



The big Mama (1998)/ Hortence Brouwn ('37)
Brons 151X63X78 cm
Museum Kura Hulanda, Curacao

"In de jaren zeventig en tachtig was de vrouw met krulspelden in het haar – in de volksmond *Shawawa* genoemd – een alledaags onderdeel van het straatbeeld". (*Arte: Dutch Caribbean art: Beeldende kunst van de Nederlandse Antillen en Aruba / Adi Martis & Jennifer Smit*)

For the presentation

Interview kan bekeken worden via:

<http://www.rnw.nl/caribiana/video/kroeshaar-kapsel-als-fashionstatement>

Is 'natural hair' tegenwoordig een fashion statement of een maatschappelijk statement?

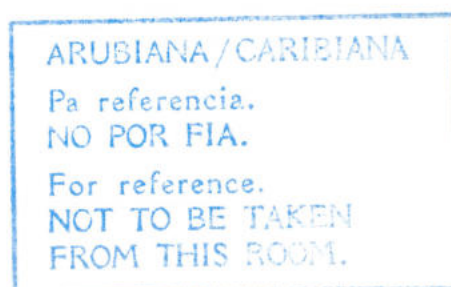
Veel vrouwen worden bewust en onbewust grootgebracht met het idee: hoe gladder je haar, hoe beter. Ze laten hun kroeshaar chemisch behandelen, waardoor het steil wordt. Maar de laatste jaren is dit aan het veranderen. Zelfs de Amerikaanse Sesamstraat maakte een ode aan natuurlijk haar. Met de nieuwe video, genaamd 'I Love My Hair' willen ze bereiken dat donkere meisjes hun kroeshaar meer accepteren. Het zorgeloze liedje lijkt een ode aan kroeshaar, maar geeft ook aan dat er veel veranderd is op het gebied van donkere schoonheid.

Een reportage van Patricia Cronie en Margo de Haas

<http://www.rnw.nl/caribiana/video/kroeshaar-kapsel-als-fashionstatement>

'Cabei natural' awendia ta un afirmacion di moda of un afirmacion social?

Hopi hende muhe ta lanta consciente of inconscientemente cu e idea: mas liso bo cabeï ta, mas mihor. Nan ta duna nan cabeï di peper un tratamiento kimico, pa haci'e liso. Pero delaster añanan e cos aki ta cambiando. Hasta e programa mericano Sesame Street a hasi un oda na cabeï natural. Ku e video nobo yama 'I love My Hair' nan ke logra cu mucha muhenan di colo scur ta acepta nan cabeï mas. E cantica sin preocupacion ta parce un oda na cabeï peper, pero tambe e ta indica cu hopi cos a cambia riba tereno di bunitesa di hende colo scur.



Short bio: *My name is Gina and I consider myself a Caribbean woman. I was born on Aruba, lived in Holland for 17 years, lived in Surinam for 3 years, lived on Aruba for 28 years and plan to die here. I speak 5 languages, I am a product (or a blend) of at least 5 different cultures. So I am. Very much so.*

The case of 'My hair'

Context: Short course on 'Caribbean studies'

Identity of the Aruban/Caribbean female and there within: Identification/Acceptance of her own natural hair.

A few questions were emailed to women on Aruba of different ages. I have decided to leave the different reactions in the languages of choice the respondents used. Since we live on a multilingual island.

Questions:

1. *Do you like/love your hair?*
2. *How would you 'describe' your hair?*
3. *How do you think your hair is perceived by others?*
4. *How did you feel about your hair when you were little?*
5. *What was said by others (family members) about your hair when you were little?*
6. *Did you ever want different hair? What kind of hair?*
7. *Do you feel different about your hair in this current phase of your life compared to when you were a child or a teenager?*
8. *If you could change something about your hair what would it be?*
9. *Do you think the Aruban/Caribbean female is 'liberated' when it comes to her hair?*
10. *Do you think your hair should be in a commercial?*

Over time the perception of black hair has gone through different phases. Specially by women themselves. We all know the words 'good hair', *cabei malo*, *cabei crenchi*, *'pal'i bruha'*, *cabei peper*. *Tur ta palabranan cu ta duna un indicacion cu esaki ta inferior na un otro tipo di cabeì, e cabeì 'bon' (good hair)*. We remember all kinds of treatments, curling pins, hot comb, relaxers. Some women think straight hair is viewed as more 'professional'.

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If you start looking for information on Caribbean women and hair you will find a lot of information, both on the Internet as in magazines, blogs and talk shows, videos and documentaries.

I have always been interested in women and hair. There are very few women in my opinion who are really satisfied with their hair, they always seem to want a different style, length, long or short, a different color or a different look, hence the gazillion dollar industry of hair products and

Beauty salons. You can say that women are 'sensitive' about their hair. Always have been and always will be. Women identify strongly with their hair. Take away the hair and you take away something very essential that is much more than just hair.

I'll start with the experiences with my own hair. I don't think I ever had a problem with my hair but on a few occasions I had to deal with other people's reactions, opinions and conceptions.

Gina J. (48 años)

I must have been around 10 years old maybe younger....I don't remember the exact year. I had always had long thick hair. Usually braided. Braids as long as my back.

My hair needed quite some work. Washing it and combing it. I am not sure there was hair conditioner in those days. So quite a daunting task it must have been.

We were living in Holland at the time, in the sixties. We were probably the only 'colored' children in the neighborhood and I was an 'attraction'. People would come up to us and touch my long thick hair and would make compliments. "Can I borrow your braids, please?" *"Of course not!" I thought. "These are mine!"* (but I was flattered)

My mother had to do my hair every day. And I guess she didn't always like it. She must have complained to my father....

So on one day while we visited my aunt, my dad took me out for a walk around the block. And that is what I thought we were doing, walking around the block when suddenly he pushed me into a hairdresser's salon and put me in the chair. To the hairdresser he said: "cut it all off". The hairdresser panicked and started pleading with him. "No sir, such beautiful long hair.....such a pity! Let me cut it just a little bit. But he insisted and left me there.

I can't remember that I said anything, looking back on it I think I went in some state of total paralysis, but I do remember crying. I was afraid of my father.

So the hairdresser cut it all. My father probably came back after half an hour or so and I looked like a boy. I know worse things happen to children but this was one of my childhood traumas.

And yes, as I got older I tried to follow fashion trends, I believe at one point I even had a Farrah Fawcett look (remember the blond from Charlie's Angels?). At an early age I started using the curling pins and did that for many years. (*What was I thinking?*) When I was a teenager using hair relaxer was 'the thing to do', and after that came the blow dryer. As a student and living on a very low budget it was mostly the 'Wash and wear' look, thick, curly 'minding it's own business' kindda look, every now and then the curling pins would come back into the picture though. After that, again lots' of time, money and energy was spend on the hair over the years. Lot's of blow-drying sessions with Ernesto, my Colombian hairdresser, a man I have a long lasting relationship with. I looked good....I think. ☺

I am in another phase now. I just let it be, it's own natural self, but I do cover the gray. Emotionally I am not there yet, to be a gray lady. I believe my mother thinks it's a bit of a 'wild look', in terms of '*slordig*'. I am not sure, but she sometimes has this look in her eyes.....

Vanessa P. (40 año)

I love my hair, it is curly coarse and soft at the same time very porous which makes it light up to fast by the burning sun. How others perceive my hair? it depends on how I wear it; some like it in a ponytail and others prefer it loose, the last one looks like an Afro and I guess it scares some people off. When I was little I could not stand the fact that my mom always used to make it look like Shirley Temple that made the kids make fun of me. But I guess it was easy for her to keep it neat and untangled. Family members used to say that I had 'good hair' this because my sister had to straight hers and I didn't, crazy the definition of '**good hair**'.

I wanted mine straight too when I was little just like my sister's but I guess everyone wants something different. now I know I do not need to straight my hair to make it sleek I can blow dry it but I rarely ever do, grew accustomed to my natural hair.

If I could change something about my hair I would want for it to be longer and fuller probably... The Aruban/Caribbean female is not 'liberated' when it comes to her hair. Nope! there is a lot of insecurity about it, look at all this fake hair going around. And lastly...

Hahaha I think my hair would look good in a commercial, honest I do!

Mea T. (50 año)

Ja, ik hou heel veel van mijn haar; ga elke week naar de kapper. Mijn haar is koppig, het haar doet wat hij wil; soms zit het goed, soms totaal niet. Mijn haar brengt mensen soms in verwarring, vanwege die koppigheid. Ziet er steeds weer even anders uit. Merk ik aan reacties. Ik herinner me niet meer wat ik van mijn haar vond toen ik klein was. Ik had 2 vlechten tot over mijn schouders en vrij dik haar en mijn moeder kamde de vlechten zo strak dat het je gezicht bijna vervormde.

Dat deed pijn, met een scherpe scheiding in het midden, waar nu nog steeds geen haar meer groeit. Als mijn tante mijn haar kamde, trok ze na afloop hard aan elke vlecht. Daar zou het haar van groeien. (niet dus!!) Alleen maar pijn. Als ik niet stilzat tijdens het kammen, trok mijn moeder heel hard aan het haar. Ik smachtte uiteindelijk naar het moment waarop het gestraight mocht worden (niet voor je eerste menstruatie). Op mijn 16e was het zover.

Ik herinner me mijn eerste schooldag in Nederland, ik was zes. Iedereen wilde eraan voelen en gaf commentaar. Wat ik me daarvan herinner is dat iedereen het zacht vond. Mijn moeder gaf me altijd het gevoel dat mijn haar niet deugde. Ze noemde het rood (dat van haar was gitzwart...) en gaf de "schuld" daarvan aan de familie van mijn vader (waaraan ze een hekel had). Zo ga je dus ook een aversie tegen je eigen haar ontwikkelen. Ze stuurde me meerdere keren per dag om "mijn karoe wiwiri" (de baarden van de korenplant) te gaan borstelen. Mijn vader zei altijd heel zachtjes: "Ga je haar fatsoeneren." Zo krijg je natuurlijk wel een minderwaardigheidscomplex over je haar.

Zoals ik al zei, ik kon niet wachten tot het gestraight mocht worden. Tot mijn twaalfde kamde mijn moeder mijn haar en daarna deed ik het zelf, maar zo makkelijk mogelijk. Dus geen experimenten en dat zou ook niet toegestaan worden. Ik borstelde het strak naar achteren en maakte achter 1 vlecht die ik over mijn schouder trok. Nadat het gestraight was deed ik er eigenlijk ook niets mee. Soms los tot over mijn schouders, maar meestal in een knotje (lekker makkelijk).

Na mijn scheiding wilde ik totaal iets anders en toen knipte ik het kort en dat is nog steeds zo.

Kan het ook niet meer opbrengen (geen geduld) om het weer te laten groeien.

Ja, ik let nu in deze fase van mijn leven heel goed op m'n haar en voel me eigenlijk niet echt goed als het niet zit, zoals ik dat wil. Soms heb ik toch ook iets van: "Wie niet het niet wil zien, sluit zijn ogen maar..."

Ik heb enkele maanden terug Keratine gedaan uit pure nieuwsgierigheid; ik zag veel vrouwen het doen bij mijn kapster en wilde zien of het mij ook zou staan. Het werd een regelrechte ramp, want mijn haar is en was te kort en door de keratine bleef het als richtingwijzers alle kanten op staan.

Ik kon er weken niets mee. Nooit meer dus!!!

Is de Arubaans/Caribische vrouw 'vrij' wat betreft haar haar? De "echte" Arubanen met sluik haar over het algemeen niet. Ik zie het in de klas, ze lijken allemaal op elkaar. Lang haar, liefst zo sluik mogelijk geföhnd. Korte kapsels lijken voor jonge vrouwen bijna taboe. Die kom je weer bij oudere vrouwen vaker tegen. De donkere Arubanen doen wel van alles met hun haar, althans ze durven meer en besteden er ook veel tijd aan. Dit geldt vooral voor jonge meiden.

Oudere zwarte vrouwen die minder draagkrachtig lijken, hebben hun haar vaak in eenzelfde stijl: strak naar binnen gevlochten of gestraight in een staartje. Oudere zwarte vrouwen die opgeleid zijn, durven vaak hun haar "het werk te laten doen", wat wil zeggen dat ze het haar niet hun wil opleggen.

Mag m'n haar in een reclamespotje? Neen, ik zou niet weten waarom. Zo bijzonder is het niet.

Als het ongestraight was, zou ik het wel willen.

Olga B. (60 años)

Mi ta haya e tema hopi pret. Tempo nos ta mucha, 7 ruman muhe, bo por imagina bo, ta hirarkia tawata tin. Mi ruman muhe mayor, ta pone bo sinta abou, mei mei di su pia. No risca move bo cabetes, e ta ranca bo cabey, pasobra ta e mester a Peña tur e paardenstaart- y vlechten. Anto asina strak pa e no bruha. Tempo nos a crece nos tawata rolls nos cabey cu rol di papel di W.C. bashi. Anto straight cabey mucho jong, kima tur nos cuero di cabetes! Hende sa haci coi loco.

I don't really like my hair at the moment. I would describe it as terrible and really sick. I think others perceive my hair as 'all right', they don't really notice the terrible shape my hair is in at the moment. Child memories: In those days I suffered a lot, because my older sister used to pull my hair when she combed it. Family member would comment that I had the 'best + fine hair' of the family, the girls. I wanted it long and soft, like my friends. Yes, oh yes. When I grew up, I was very much at ease with my hair, because I could handle it myself. Now, it's getting gray, thin, falling out. I don't think the Aruban/Caribbean female is liberated about her hair, Not really, we keep using chemicals to 'improve' our hair. My hair in a commercial? Yes why not?

Doris dAG. (45 años)

Yes, I like my hair. It's thick, frizzy, and sometimes 'flyaway'. I think others see my hair as 'okay', because I take good care of it. When I was little I could not care for it myself so I always wore a pony tail. I don't remember any comments. Did I want different hair? Yes, I wanted sleek

brown hair, so I would never need to comb it. Yes, I feel different about my hair now, I have it short so it's more easily manageable. Yes, I think the Aruban/Caribbean female is liberated about her hair seeing all the different types of hairdo's and colors. No commercial for me, no, nothing fancy about it.

Liesje S. (45 año)

I like my hair, its fine hair, thin hair. I think it is perceived 'good' by others. As a child I had nice curls and they liked that I was blond. Yes, I wanted straight hair. I still feel that way. If I could change anything I would like to have thicker and straight hair that is easy to manage. I think the Aruban/Caribbean female is not yet liberated about her hair. No commercial for me.

Andrina O. (30 año)

I'm pretty satisfied with my hair, It is a little wild with a little bit of waves (geen krullen), vooral na het wassen gaat het zo'n beetje een eigen leven leiden. Ik denk dat mensen vinden dat ik een mooie dik bos haar heb. No particular childhood memories about my hair. Family members thought my hair had a nice color (goudbruin). YES! I would like some curls. I believe the nice color and gloss is gone.

Hier in Nederland hebben de meeste mensen stijl haar dat meestal mooi en strak in model zit. En dan kom ik langs met mijn wilde haren die door het (vochtige) weer ook nog eens statisch wordt, raar verschijnsel. Op Aruba had ik dat probleem niet. I would change the color and the style (met krullen natuurlijk zoals mijn tante het heeft) if I could. I think that most of Aruban female don't care that much about their hair (helaas). In a commercial? Why not?

Betty G. (69 año)

Yes, I like my hair, it's soft and curly. I think others find it too short. When I was little I thought my hair was too long. Others perceived my hair as silk threads. I wanted straight hair. Now I take it as it is, but if I could change something about my hair, I would want to have a big tuft of hair. I believe the Aruban/Caribbean female is liberated about her hair and..... I don't feel my hair should be in a commercial.

("Tempo cu mi tabata chikito mi tabatin cabei largo anto mi wela tabata peña nos cabei. Anto e tabata hunta zeta di coco den e cabei. Nos tabatin strik den cabei y den weekend krul den cabei. Mi wela tabata streng ora di peña cabei. Si bo a hera move bo cabes e tabata 'toks' nos. Mi kier a siña peña cabei mi mes pa evita cu mi wela mester a peña mi cabei. Antes tabatin un 'kerencia' encuanto cu cortamento di cabei. Bo por a corta cabei solamente cu luna yen of luna nobo, mi no ta corda mucho bon mas.....

Angelle S. (17 años)

I love my hair, it's dark Brown, big, curly, somehow manageable. People think it's cool and I always play with it. When I was little I didn't like it very much, because it was hard and painful to comb, and I cried a lot because of that. They teased me "Rasta" or "Afro" and I didn't like that very much. When I was little I wanted to have straight fine hair, because it looked easier to comb. Yes, now I love my curly hair because it's fun. Now I think that straight hair would be boring to have. If I could change anything I would change the length, I would like it to grow longer, faster. Yes, I think the Aruban/Caribbean female is 'liberated' when it comes to her hair, We don't hide our hair. Its part of the female being and women should not care about what people think and should use the hair for self-expression. The one who minds others' opinion, will not be liberated. A commercial? No. I won't profit from my hair.

Mariangela D. (25 años)

No, I don't like my hair, I would prefer another kind of hair. It's thin/delicate. I think other think it has the wrong color (Too dark). When I was little I felt good about it. Others and family members thought I had nice hair. I wanted to have curly hair for a change. I feel like it's not a big deal now. I would like it to have more volume. Yes, *I think the Aruban/Caribbean female is 'liberated' when it comes to her hair.* My hair in a commercial? For sure not.

Yvonne E. (42 años)

Yes, I like/love my hair, ik heb een mooie volle bos haar, maar (relatief) veel werk om het zo te krijgen. I believe others think my hair is nice. When I was little I always wanted straight long hair. Yes, long hair that does not need any treatment like relaxing. I still want nice long curly hair (geen kroes haar). Others always thought I had a lot of hair. If I could change something about my hair what would it be? That I had to spend less time every week to 'fix' my hair. Yes, I think the Aruban/Caribbean female is 'liberated' when it comes to her hair and Yes, my hair could be in a commercial!

Ilonka T. (46 años)

Yes I like my hair, it is quite easy, easy to straighten and not a lot of work everyday. I think others think my hair is nice and thick, but they say its kind of frizzy. When I was little I wanted it straight and went to a lot of trouble to get it straight (Media buelta). I don't remember remarks about my hair when I was a child, they liked it since I straightened it. Yes, I wanted wavy hair or straight hair. I accept my hair now and am proud of it, maybe if I could change something about the texture?, I like straight hair because it feels smooth and is shiny. Yes I think the Aruban/Caribbean female is 'liberated' when it comes to her hair, nowadays yes. Yes, my hair

should be in a commercial, I think so, we rarely see my kind of hair in commercials, it's either black people's hair or white people's hair.

Gwen J. (40 aña)

I think my hair is okay, can't say I love it. It's curly and also frizzy, which I don't like, that's why I always tie it. I don't think my hair attracts any attention to people, it's just okay.

When I was little I had a lot more hair, I used to call it "Chaka Khan" hair. That's who I looked like if I combed it out. I thought it was horrible!!!

I don't really remember what family members used to say about my hair, or if they said anything at all. I handled it myself, even used to relax it myself. Of course I always wanted to have sleek hair, I would still prefer it.

I don't think Aruban/Caribbean females are different from women around the world. Hair is always an issue for women. You see all stores are packed with hair products....it's a money maker, they are making money on our insecurity/or need to look good.

My hair should definitely not be in a commercial!!!

Jeaninne W. (47 aña)

Manera mi kabei ta awor mi no guste masha. E ta fini di relaks anto mi mester fuhrn mi kabei tur siman. Mi no por hasi masha kune awor. Tur hende ku wak mi kabei ku duna un komentario ta haya mi kabei masha bunita mes. E ta manera un peluka.

Mi kabei ta fini di relaks pues awor e tin kemikalio den dje I e ta fini fini. Mi a hinka un pintura di henna kora den dje dus awor e tin un glans kora ku ta masha bunita ora mi ta den solo. E kabei aki, mi mes no por mantene pues tur siman mi mester bai fohn mi kabei na kapsalon.

3. How do you think your hair is perceived by others?

Manera e ta, pa hopi hende e ta klop ku mi trabou. Heel braafjes en mooi net als een kantoor medewerker het zou moeten hebben.

4. How did you feel about your hair when you were little?

Dia mi tabata chiki mi tatin kroes haar, ku ta krul hopi. Mi tabata gusta mi kabei losamente e tempu ei mi tabata kier a hane mas fini paso ora mi pena habri mi kabei ta bira meskos ku un leon. Pues ku 12 ana mi a relaks mi kabei pa prome biaha.

5. What was said by others (family members) about your hair when you were little?

Nou het waren 2 vlechten, niemand die zei "oh wat leuke vlechtjes of zo". Dus het was voor mij heel normaal om geen commentaar te krijgen op mijn vlechten. Ik mocht mijn haar nooit open laten paso nan ta pega den konopi anto mi no tabata gusta pena pa saka e konopinan. Pues na chiki nada di kompliment pa mi kabeinan bunita.

Ora mi tatin 12 ana mi tabata ke kabei fini I largu pa mi por a pena kabei habri pa ora mi bai den bientu, nan waya tur banda. Mi ta kier pena paardestaart largu. Na grandi mi a gusta mi kabei natural, pa mi pena mi kabei habri I pa bientu tira nan den tur direkshon. Te ainda mi lo ke nan ku krul I preferibel kora, brons ku pa ami ta simbolisa libertat.

Awor mi kier e te na mi schouder yen yen di krul.

No, mi no ta kere cu nos ta 'liberated', pero mi ta mira un cambio positivo si. Mas hende ta laga nan kabei keda natural I hasi model, pena nan kabei natural I esei ta algu di apresia. No ta papia mas di esun kabei krin (kroes haar).

Naturalmente mi por hasi un komersial pa e relaxer ku mi ta usa paso mi kabei ta keda manera un peluka of pa e kolo kora ku ta para pa un muhe ku sa kiko e ke anto e tin mundu na su pia (haha!). Si mi kabei lo tabata natural lo mi por a kombina mi kabei natural I un muhe eksitoso.

Conclusion:

Some of the ideas Caribbean women have about their hair is related to their ethnical background and the historial baggage linked to it. (Kroes haar is in de geschiedenis altijd meer 'beladen' geweest.)

I got 13 reactions. 11 out of the 13 women interviewed really like and/or love their hair. Some women state they find their hair difficult to manage (as in 'to comb through'). Question remains though why are combs and brushes used that were designed for other types of hair? Some of the women at one point in their lives used to chemically relax their hair or wanted 'straight' hair.

I really wanted to find out if women nowadays perceive their hair differently and that is why the question "Do you think the Aruban/Caribbean female is 'liberated' when it comes to her hair?" was raised. 6 women believe Aruban/Caribbean females are liberated when it comes to their hair and 5 believe Aruban/Caribbean females are not liberated, 2 are in the middle or not clear on this point. I think it might depend also on the age group, Older women may have 'older' ideas in their heads as in 'entrenched ideas'. I think younger women tend to be more liberated about their hair. They have left behind more of the 'traditional' ideas and beliefs in general. Also, times have changed and the world seems more 'accepting' to Black hair. And by the 'world' I mean 'women'.

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